

A young man rode his horse, his short black hair glistening with sweat.

His forehead creased as he tried to keep his mind off the discomfort, focusing on the feeling in his palms. Every few seconds, he released the gathered mana, trying to gather a bit more of it with each attempt and to compress it to an even tighter ball before letting go. Riding made concentrating a challenge, but it was the only way he'd found to keep his thoughts occupied. And he *had* managed to pull it off – for the most part. At least until his horse stepped on something and the bump made him wince.

Elaine hadn't said much over the last couple of days. Well, if he excluded her frequent apologies. She'd already told him how sorry she was over falling asleep a million times. And here she was, approaching him for the million-and-first.

SPLASH

A beautiful azure ribbon snaked towards him, gently caressing the wounds on his legs. It felt cool and soft, soothing the sting briefly. Still, it couldn't heal him. Back at home, life users were a copper a dozen, and any one of them could patch him up rather easily. Hell, it would take baldy less than a second if he deigned to waste his mana on him. Sadly, both of his escorts for this trip had the water affinity instead. Such was the cruelty of genetics. He'd have to put up with this for another week.

"Percy... I'm so so, so sorry!" she said again, as he raised his hand to stop her.

By now he felt a bit bad seeing her squirm. He was tempted to undersell his injuries to make her feel better. After all, the only reason she and her dad were accompanying him in the first place was because *she* had pleaded to their grandpa for *his* sake. But Percy wasn't the best actor. He couldn't downplay the pain. Besides, learning from this mistake would serve her well in the future. Even prodigies couldn't be careless in the wilderness.

"Just be careful from now on." is what he ended up saying.

However, upon seeing her downtrodden expression, he couldn't help himself.

“It was an accident anyway. Who would’ve thought we’d run into a goblin mage of all things.” he added.

Most of the creatures were born at Red which was one of the reasons his cousins had often called him “goblin” among other names. A goblin born at Orange was actually rarer than a human born at Yellow. Even then, they wouldn’t necessarily figure out how to use their magic.

*‘Huh, come to think of it, that one was probably more talented than I am.’* he chuckled.

Still, the most surprising part about the attack was the affinity it had used. According to Gawain, the silencing effect had most likely been the result of a Crude sound spell.

Mana affinities typically came in four flavours. The five elemental affinities were the most common. About eighty percent of humans on Remior were born with fire, water, air, earth or lightning cores. Next were those born without an affinity. About one in five fell into this category. *It sucked to be in this category.* Not that pure mana was entirely useless. Concentrated, it could still pack a punch. Still, a blast of pure mana was typically about a full grade weaker than it was supposed to be.

Less than 1% of the population was born with anything else. This number was further split into two groups. One included the rare affinities such as space, time, life, mind and so on. Those were generally difficult to pass on. His family was an exception, as their Clone bloodline allowed nearly half of them to be born with a life core. It was one of the reasons the Avalon House was so respected. The final group were those born with a composite affinity. It was nothing more than the combination of two elemental ones. The sound affinity the goblin had used was a result of air and lightning mana mixing.

This book's true home is on another platform. Check it out there for the real experience.

As for anything else?

Well, nobody had ever heard of a triple elemental affinity or a double rare affinity.

In any case, Elaine nodded, letting him return to his practice. Percy willed the mana to gather in his hand once more, as he recalled the moment he used it against the goblin.

*'It definitely did something.'*

The blast hadn't left any visible injuries on the creature's body, but it had stopped it in its tracks for an abnormal amount of time. It had just stood still, waiting for Elaine to bisect it several seconds later.

SIGH

*'No sense in torturing myself thinking about it I suppose.'*

He'd already waited fifteen years. He could wait another day. For now, he was better off just learning how to shape his magic. Bolt after bolt, he kept firing his mana randomly, working on both his cast time and potency. It wasn't until they rode up a hill that Elaine pulled him out of the trance again.

"Percy! Look!"

Lifting his eyes, he saw it. A colossal shadow stretched across the horizon. It was faintly obscured by a strange rosy mist, but there was no mistaking it.

*'The Oracle Mountain.'*

This was their destination. Or well, the temple located somewhere at its base was.

The trio pressed on for another few hours, before setting camp at night. Elaine was visibly tense, hawking their surroundings as if her life depended on it.

Percy chuckled at the sight.

The grasslands *could* be more dangerous than the forest, as bandits typically roamed them, looking for easy targets. But not this close to the temple. According to Gawain, even the dumbest lowlifes knew not to provoke the affiliates of the Divine Order. His cousin didn't seem to know that, however. Her dad hadn't told her, probably still punishing her. Percy wouldn't interfere in their family matters.

Looking back towards the mountain, he tried to make out the layer of mist surrounding it. But he couldn't see it. He knew it was still there, but it was invisible against the dark blanket of the night.

He rubbed his hands in anticipation. Even though he'd never had the opportunity to travel much, he'd spent a lot of time in the House's library, reading all sorts of things about Remior and the upper echelons of the world. Those were the heights of magic he dreamt of reaching one day!

The weirdly coloured fog was one of his targets for the trip. Supposedly, it was a gift from the titaness, Phoebe, the current leader of the Divine Order. Showering the mountain range, it trickled down the rocky slopes and accumulated at a basin, where it was used by the temple as fuel for the affinity test. Similar locations existed all around Remior. As far as he knew, the Order was interested in getting children evaluated early on, to fish out the talents among them, replenishing their ranks. But more importantly, Percy was interested in *what* the rosy mist was.

Mind mana.

And in just a few hours he would practically be bathing in it. Swimming inside a sea of it. Inhaling it with every breath. If this wasn't enough for his second core, he genuinely had no clue where to find a better source.

He was almost tempted to jump on his horse and ride towards it right then and there. But he didn't feel like explaining to his cousin and uncle why he was so eager. It wasn't like the priests performed appraisals during the night. Plus, horseback was rather painful for him.

In the end, he shrugged, resuming his practice as he formed a colourless blob of mana in his hand, squeezing it down into a transparent ball, about the size of a tangerine.

He wasn't sure if he had improved at all. One typically needed weeks if not months of work before they noticed a difference. Not days. At least, he could train a lot more since his advancement. He was able to store more mana than before and to recover it much faster. Still, despite all his efforts, his Status page had not bothered to register his magic. Apparently, he hadn't even crossed the threshold of a Crude spell yet.

*'Tell that to the goblin, rotting somewhere in the Woods.'*

Of course, Percy knew that if his magic hadn't registered yet, it probably meant he was using it incorrectly. It certainly didn't seem to have any physical effect, so he'd considered it might be mind mana. That would explain how the

blast had disoriented the creature. But that didn't sound right. His colourless mana didn't look anything like the rosy mist surrounding the mountain...

*'Ugh... eight more hours, Percy. Just forget about it for eight more hours.'*